

CLAIMS

1. A marketing system for selectively modifying an existing communications network by modifying a portion of the processing software of the existing communications network and by replacing at least a portion of a call progress signal generated by the communications network by a generally continuous pre-recorded announcement, the system comprising:

means for placing a call by a calling party at a first network address;

means for connecting the call to an identified called station at a second network address, the called station having either a busy status or an idle status;

means for initially determining the busy/idle status of the called station and, if the called station has an initial busy status, for thereafter checking the busy/idle status of the called station at predetermined intervals;

means for playing at least one generally continuous announcement to the calling party for a predetermined period of time during a time period when a call progress signal would have been provided to the calling party, said playing means determining the announcement to play based upon criteria established exclusively by the marketing system and independently of the identity of the called station; and

means for terminating the playing of the announcement and completing the call to the called station, in the case of the called station having an initial idle status, said announcement terminating and call completing means completing the call when the called station responds by answering the call and, in the case of the called station having an initial busy status, said announcement terminating and call completing means completing the call when the status of the called station

25

changes to an idle status and the called station thereafter responds by answering the call.

2. The system as recited in claim 1 wherein the playing means can play a sequence of announcements and wherein
5 the system repeatedly generates additional announcements at predetermined intervals until the called station responds by answering the call or the calling party abandons the call.

3. The system as recited in claim 1 further comprising interaction means for permitting the calling party to
10 interact with the announcement during the playing of the announcement by initiating a predetermined response.

4. The system as recited in claim 1 further comprising selecting means for allowing the calling party to select a type of announcement to be played.

5. The system according to claim 1 wherein the network includes at the calling party location a video terminal connected to the network and capable of receiving video messages transmitted through the network.

6. The system as recited in claim 1 wherein the announcement is digitally stored within the playing means.

~~7. The system as recited in claim 1 further including means, remotely located from the playing means, for changing, updating or deleting the announcement.~~

8. A method for use with an existing communications
25 network for replacing at least a portion of a call progress signal generated by the communications network when a call is placed by a calling party at a first network address and prior to the connection of the call to an identified called station at a second network address, the called station having either a busy
30 status or an idle status, the method comprising:

initially determining the busy/idle status of the called station and, if the called station has an initial busy

26

status, thereafter checking the busy/idle status of the called station at predetermined intervals;

playing at least one generally continuous announcement to the calling party for a predetermined period of time during a time period when a call progress signal would have been provided to the calling party, the announcement being determined based upon criteria established exclusively by the marketing system and independently of the identity of the called station; and

terminating the playing of the announcement and completing the call to the called station, in the case of the called station having an initial idle status, when the called station responds by answering the call and, in the case of the called station having an initial busy status, when the status of the called station changes to an idle status and the called station thereafter responds by answering the call.

9. The method as recited in claim 8 further comprising the step of playing a sequence of announcements at predetermined intervals until the called station answers the call or the calling party abandons the call.

10. The method as recited in claim 8 further comprising the step of permitting the calling party to interact with the announcement during the playing of the announcement by initiating a predetermined response.

11. The method as recited in claim 8 further comprising the step of allowing the calling party to select a type of announcement to be played.